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AUTHOR Raivetz, Mark J.
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ABSTRACT

The Philadelphia School District's desegregation expansion strategy seeks to achieve and maintain a diverse student population in 117 desegregated schools through providing incentives for voluntary student transfers. One type of transfer is the EH36, which occurs when a student wishes to transfer between a neighborhood school and another open enrollment school. During the 1984-1985 school year, parents who requested EH36 return to neighborhood school transfers were interviewed by telephone. Reasons for returning to neighborhood schools varied. Some parents cited more than one reason, and decisions to return were also dependent on the grade organization of a child's school and the time of year a request was made. Parents' reasons for requesting EH36 fell into six general categories: (1) curriculum or coursework; (2) student dislike of the school; (3) administrative; (4) transportation; (5) family; and (6) physical or emotional health of students. The other type of transfer is the EH38, a process utilized for transfers into those schools having special admissions requirements. The greatest reason for a transfer request cited by parents of children in special admission high schools concerned the difficulty or unsuitability of coursework. Transportation problems were the most cited in comprehensive high schools and junior/middle and elementary schools. The implications of these findings are clear: fewer parents and students will opt out of the voluntary transfer program if: (1) the transportation system operates more smoothly; (2) supportive services for students who dislike the new school are in place; and (3) students are given a realistic perception of the programs and schools they are considering. The district's ability to limit resegregation is related directly to the support it is willing to give to this effort. (KH)

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RETURN TO NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS: RESULTS OF A PARENT SURVEY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DESEGREGATION POLICY

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Report Prepared by

Dr. Mark J. Raivetz
Research Associate for
Desegregation and School Improvement

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Prepared By

Dr. Mark J. Raivetz
Research Associate for
Desegregation and School Improvement

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Desegregation Office

Transfers for Desegregation

The District's desegregation expansion strategy seeks to achieve and maintain a diverse student population in 117 target, desegregated and far Northeast schools through encouraging and providing incentives for voluntary student transfers.

There are two types of transfers: EH36 and EH38. EH36 transfers occur when a student wishes to transfer between a neighborhood school and any other open enrollment school. The EH38 transfer process is utilized for transfers into those schools having special admissions requirements. Free transportation, either by direct bus service or bus tokens, is provided.

Support for Students Who Transfer

The Desegregation Office established a Supportive Services Unit responsible for providing direct services to parents and their children who opted for voluntary transfers. Desegregation coordinators, Human Relations Collaborators, school counselors and Principals monitored transferees through individual conferences. In addition, attendance was checked, academic progress was followed, and involvement in extra-curricular activities was encouraged. Support for the child in the new school was stressed in the hope that requests to return to the sending school would be minimized.

Returning to the Neighborhood School

In spite of the efforts to supply necessary support, a student who volunteers for desegregation may, if not satisfied with the new school, request a return to the neighborhood school.

This report summarizes the results of interviews of parents who requested EH36 return to neighborhood school transfers for their children during the 1984-1985 school year.

Data were collected by means of a telephone survey conducted by members of the Desegregation Office staff. The survey form (included in the appendix) was designed by the Desegregation/School Improvement Evaluation Unit.

From October 1984 until April 1985, parents of 532 students submitted EH36 requests to return. Of that number, the Desegregation Office managed to interview 406 parents (76.3%). Parents of the remaining 126 students could not be reached.

Reasons for returning to neighborhood schools -- for opting out of the Voluntary Desegregation Plan -- varied. Some parents cited more than one reason. Decisions to return were also dependent on the grade organization of a child's school and the time of year the request was made.

Reasons for Requesting Returns

Table 1 shows results of the telephone survey. Interviews were summarized monthly by the evaluation staff. For the purpose of this report, October, November and December requests were combined into the Fall total. January,

TABLE 1

RETURN TO NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOL PARENT TELEPHONE SURVEY
OCTOBER 1984 - APRIL 1985

REASONS FOR TRANSFER

Total	Curr/Work		Dislike		Administrative		Transportation		Family		Health		Other	
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.
HIGH SCHOOL														
Special Admission														
Fall														
134	53	39.55	33	24.63	11	8.21	17	12.69	10	7.46	4	2.99	6	4.48
Spring														
254	151	59.45	25	9.84	14	5.51	12	4.72	25	9.84	12	4.72	14	5.51
Total														
388	204	52.58	58	14.95	25	6.44	29	7.47	35	9.02	16	4.12	20	5.15
Comprehensive														
Fall														
121	15	12.40	17	14.05	22	18.18	35	28.93	6	4.96	1	0.83	25	20.66
Spring														
165	32	19.39	16	9.70	40	24.24	40	24.24	21	12.73	5	3.03	11	6.67
Total														
286	47	16.43	33	11.54	62	21.68	75	26.22	27	9.44	6	2.10	36	12.59
Jr. High School, Middle School, Elementary														
Fall														
148	8	5.41	30	20.27	27	18.24	62	41.89	11	7.43	3	2.03	7	4.73
Spring														
328	55	16.77	62	18.90	47	14.33	78	23.78	43	13.11	9	2.74	34	10.37
Total														
476	63	13.24	92	19.33	74	15.55	140	29.41	54	11.34	12	2.52	41	8.61
Summary, All Schools														
Fall														
403	76	18.86	80	19.85	60	14.89	114	28.29	27	6.70	8	1.99	38	9.43
Spring														
747	238	31.86	103	13.79	101	13.52	130	17.40	89	11.91	26	3.48	59	7.90
Total														
1150	314	27.30	183	15.91	161	14.00	244	21.22	116	10.09	34	2.96	97	8.43

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February, March and April requests were combined into the Spring total. Overall, the 406 parents cited 1150 reasons for requesting returns. These reasons fell into the following six categories:

- Curriculum/Course work: the student was falling behind in classes; the work was too hard; student not finding academic success.
- Dislike of the school: the student was dissatisfied with his classmates, teachers or school administration; or was experiencing other school related problems including attendance, cutting, lateness, racial conflict, discipline.
- Administrative: the student moved; the school administration requested an administrative transfer; the transfer request had been cancelled.
- Transportation: the student was experiencing transportation problems (SEPTA or contracted bus); bus ride too long; pick-up too early; service undependable; discipline problems on busses; safety concerns at pick-up and drop-off points.
- Family: the parent wanted the child closer to home; student wants to be near friends; parent unable to get to school in emergency.
- Health: the parent cited physical or emotional health of the student.

Interpreting Parental Responses

Reasons why parents requested returns were dependent on the school grade organization of the child's school and the time of year the request was made. Those are shown clearly in Table 1.

The greatest reason cited by parents of children in Special Admission High Schools was Curriculum/Coursework. This finding was consistent for fall and spring, accounting for over half of the requests to return (52.58%) throughout the year. Dislike of school and Family reasons were also noted. Transportation reasons dropped from fall to spring, as this generally was not a concern for students in special admissions high schools, since most use SEPTA busses.

In targeted Comprehensive High Schools, parents cited Transportation as the primary reason for requesting returns (26.22%), followed by Administrative and Curriculum/Coursework concerns. From fall to spring, Transportation reasons dropped off slightly while Administrative and Curriculum/Coursework reasons increased. SEPTA is the primary mode of transportation here as well.

In targeted Junior/ Middle and Elementary Schools, Transportation was again cited by parents as the primary reason for requesting a return to the neighborhood school (29.41%). It should be noted however, that management reforms within the Division of Transportation were reflected in the proportionate drop in this category from fall (41.89% of the reasons) to spring (23.78% of the reasons). Dislike of the school and Administrative reasons were also stated by parents of children attending these schools.

A Summary of requests by category for all parents surveyed concludes Table 1. Although these data may best be interpreted at the school grade organization level, the summary does provide a good look at changes by category from fall to spring.

Transportation related reasons dropped from fall to spring (28.29% to 17.40%) with a corresponding increase in the number of Curriculum/Coursework reasons (18.86% to 31.86%). Dislike of the school (19.85% fall; 13.79% spring), and Administrative (14.89% fall; 13.52% spring) both dropped. Family, Health, and Other categories accounted for a smaller proportion of reasons for returning. For the most part, these reasons are beyond the District's power to control.

Implications for Desegregation Policy

Parents of students in Philadelphia want control over where their children attend school (Raivetz, 1983). The court approved voluntary desegregation plan allows parents to maintain that control. In a very real sense however, a voluntary desegregation plan may be more difficult for a district to maintain than a plan that calls for mandatory student assignment.

The same EH36 procedures that enable a child to volunteer for desegregation enable that same child to return to a segregated neighborhood school.

The District rarely has more than one chance with a child who volunteers for desegregation. Should that child and his family have an unsatisfactory experience, the District stands to lose (through non-participation) siblings, relatives and friends as well.

The commitment to desegregate targeted and Far Northeast schools will be affected negatively by students returning to their segregated neighborhood schools.

Implications for desegregation policy, based on parents' reasons for requesting return transfers, are clear. They focus on Transportation, Dislike of the school, and Curriculum/Coursework.

The impact of a transportation system that results in large numbers of students opting out of the desegregation plan (before they may even experience desegregation) has been well documented. Management reforms within the Division of Transportation are reflected in the spring survey data (see Table 1) and are documented in the Superintendent's Eighth Interim Report on Desegregation Planning (August 1985). The implication of a smoothly operating transportation system is fewer requests for returns to neighborhood schools.

Students who dislike their new schools may have a negative impact not only on the desegregation school they transfer to, but also on the neighborhood school to which they return. Supportive services within the school as well as through the Desegregation Office should be in place early in the school year. This is especially important during the first year of the transfer (although monitoring of transfer students throughout their desegregation experience is also important).

Regular contact with transfer students, attention to grades, attendance, rosters, participation in activities, etc. sends a clear message of caring to parents and students. The implication of a smoothly operating support system within the schools is fewer requests for returns.

The impact of curriculum/coursework concerns on requests to return to neighborhood schools is, perhaps, the most critical. Students not finding academic success in their new schools opted to leave. While most prevalent in special admission high schools, this category accounted for the largest number of reasons throughout the year and the greatest increase in reasons cited from

fall to spring. One implication of this finding is that more careful monitoring of academic progress for transferees is needed. Earlier detection and direct contact with parents might prevent a child from requesting a return. Supportive services must be maintained, and where possible, increased.

Students and their parents must be given a realistic perception of the programs and schools which they are considering (even if this results in slightly fewer volunteers). It is the net number of participants that will contribute to the success of the voluntary desegregation effort, not the initial number.

There is a broader implication as well. Systemwide initiatives such as the Standardized Curriculum, Citywide Testing Program and Promotion Policy must be implemented with great care in target and desegregated schools as to prevent the resegregation that has occurred in other large urban districts. Additional academic support programs may have to be developed to assist transferring students.

Special admissions high schools, whose students account for the largest proportion of these returns, will need to give these concerns special attention.

The District's ability to decrease the number of return to neighborhood school requests by parents for their children is related directly to the support it is willing to give to this effort.

REFERENCES

Clayton, C. E. Eighth interim report on desegregation planning. School District of Philadelphia. August 1985.

Raivetz, M. J. Implications of Mandatory pupil assignment for desegregation. Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation. School District of Philadelphia. September 1983.

APPENDIX

RETURN TO NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS SURVEY OCTOBER 1984

INSTRUCTIONS: Sort EH36 forms and select those with phone numbers.
Number the survey form at upper right. Attach to this page.

FILL IN THE SCRIPT BELOW. DIAL PHONE NUMBER LISTED AND ASK FOR PERSON SIGNED AS PARENT/GUARDIAN, AND SAY:

I am_____from the Desegregation Office of the School District.
I have a notice that you filed a transfer request for_____(pupil) to go to_____(receiving school).

1. Is this correct? Yes_____No_____-If No, explain_____

_____

2. Is this your neighborhood school Yes_____No_____

3. I would like to find out some of the reasons for this transfer request.

Did you request the transfer because_____(pupil) CHECK ALL THAT APPLY

a. didn't like the new school_____

b. didn't get along with classmates_____

c. didn't like the teacher_____

d. curriculum wasn't satisfactory_____

e. roster wasn't satisfactory (HS Only)_____

f. class work too hard_____

TRANSPORTATION PROBLEMS

g. bus ride too long_____ Route No._____

h. bus pickup too early_____

i. discipline problems on bus_____

j. no tokens (if not bus rider)_____

k. other_____

EXPLANATIONS OFFERED FOR ITEMS CHECKED

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. One last question, would you consider transferring_____(pupil) to another school next year? Yes_____No_____

5. Do you have a preference?_____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ANSWERS

Refer to McGinley to Process by Name/ID No.

Call Record

Date	Disposition	Time

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RETURN TO NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS

Open End Codes

Academic School Problems

1.- Behind in classes; work too hard; dissatisfied with grades

2 - Curriculum/roster unsatisfactory

3.- Attendance, cutting, lateness

4 - Didn't like classmates, teacher, principal, counselors

5.- Racial conflict in school

6.- Special Education problems

7.- Discipline problems

Administrative Problems

11 - Suspended, EH21, principal forced transfer request

12 - Moved

13 - Not attending school until transferred

14 - Cancel request

15 - Already transferred

Family Reasons

21 - Parent wants child close to home

- hard to get child to bus

- needed nearer for siblings

- to be away from negative influences

- to be near friends

22 - Pupil wants to return: to be near friends

23 - Parent couldn't get to school when called

- no money; no transportation

24 closer to home for better supervision

Transportation Problems

31 - Bus ride too early; too long; too many busses undependable, long walk to pick up point

32 - Had to pay for tokens

33 - Trouble on school bus

34 - Trouble on SEPTA

35 - Too dangerous (at pickup; elsewhere)

Health Problems - nearer home is better

41 - Illness

42 - Emotional problems

50 - other, misc.

51 dissatisfaction with feeder pattern High School

ie. Meehan feeds to Lincoln
Parent wants transfer to other H.S. because of dissatisfaction with Lincoln.